

RE: Nov. 20 editorial, "Asleep at the wheel."

The insinuation that the Department of Environmental Quality is derelict in its duty is misleading and unsubstantiated.

The Gentilly Landfill was permitted in December 2004 without any opposition. Since September 2005, the landfill has accepted substantial amounts of hurricane-generated debris in an environmentally safe manner.

The editorial said DEQ was not proactive and the extra safeguards for the levee near the Gentilly Landfill came in response to alarms by Robert Bea. This is incorrect.

DEQ has spent months implementing new safeguards at the landfill. Gentilly is one of the most monitored construction and demolition landfills in the country, well above the standards for C&D facilities. DEQ required the landfill to install sophisticated inclinometers that will detect any stability issues and devised a new waste placement sequence that allows the subsurface soil to gain shear strength during the disposal process.

The editorial's "shunned critics" comment is unsupported. We have disagreed with critics on this and other landfills, but our disagreements are based on technical and legal grounds. DEQ remains open to dialogue. In fact, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network's executive director was at the table in our building during the Nov. 7 conference call with Bea, the Army Corps of Engineers and others.

The editorial states, "Mr. Bea says the standard of levee safety the Corps of Engineers will use to evaluate the section adjacent to the landfill is hardly stringent enough." But Gordon Boutwell, an expert in waste capacity and president of Soil Testing Engineers, disagrees. Boutwell performed an engineering analysis on Gentilly and concluded the current factor of safety is protective of the nearby levee and that Bea's suggested standard is unrealistic. DEQ, EPA, and other professionals agree with Boutwell and the agencies are addressing safety concerns with a comprehensive operational plan.

DEQ has been proactive and exceeded requirements at the Gentilly Landfill in keeping with our mission of protecting human health and the environment during hurricane recovery.

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